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JOHANN REUCHLIN,  
THE FATHER OF THE STUDY OF HEBREW  
AMONG CHRISTIANS.

ON writing of Johann Reuchlin as the father of the study of Hebrew among Christians, I experience a difficulty of a peculiar nature. It would be my duty to confine myself to the dry, sober, and prosaic details of my subject; but at every step I am in danger of being drawn away from my immediate purpose by the many points of interest afforded by the personality and career of Johann Reuchlin.

Every detail in the life of Reuchlin is of absorbing interest. Whether we look upon the greatness achieved by him in his luxuriant mental endowments, or upon the greatness thrust upon him by the unholy zeal of his enemies, we are equally struck by the commanding power of his intellect, the noble dignity of his conduct, and the harmony in which the various traits of his character were blended, so as to form an imposing and, at the same time, sympathetic figure. It is almost impossible to speak of him merely as a man who was at pains to discover the abstruse rules of an unknown language; to consider Reuchlin only in the light of a laborious grammarian who devoted his life to the study of ancient languages, and thus drew Hebrew within the circle of his investigations. If he had been only this, I could at once commence discussing his books on the Hebrew language, dwelling upon the theories he evolved, the authorities upon whom they were based, the diligence bestowed by him on finding

a suitable soil for the seeds strewn, and his struggle to procure admission at the various seats of learning for his newly-discovered discipline. But he was more than a merely great scholar, whose thirst for knowledge would cause him to explore distant fields of learning. The motives that induced Reuchlin to plunge himself into the depths of Hebrew and Rabbinical lore were the outflow of his peculiarly constructed mind, and of convictions that forced his keen sense of duty into a certain direction. These we must try to comprehend first, before we are able to judge of Reuchlin as the father of the study of Hebrew in Christian Europe.

I shall, therefore, indulge in one deviation from my subject, and this only for the purpose of elucidating the workings of Reuchlin's mind when he determined to make the propagation of the study of Hebrew one of the objects of his life. I shall allow myself the pleasure of considering his convictions, both religious and philosophical, and the circumstances that caused him to embrace them, in order to understand the stimulus that impelled him to take the road on which we find him. I shall force myself, however reluctantly, to shut my eyes to the many other attractive phases of his career ; I shall omit his struggle with vile but powerful opponents when he resolutely set his face against the desire of the latter to commit all Jewish books to the fire. I shall be silent upon his many grand achievements in other branches of learning, on his career as statesman, lawyer, ambassador, courtier, writer of comedies, and of learned works on Greek and Latin languages and literature. Those who wish to gather information on these various points can refer to Ludwig Geiger's biography of Reuchlin, which appeared in Leipzig in 1871. In English there is a life of Reuchlin, by F. Barham (London, 1843), which is only an imitation of older German books on the subject. The quarrel with the book-burners is described in the *Life of Ulrich von Hutten* by Strauss, translated into English by Mrs. Sturge, and in

an essay written by me, entitled *John Pfefferkorn and the Battle of the Books*, which appeared in the JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW of January, 1892. An interesting essay on the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, from the pen of Sir William Hamilton, appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* of March, 1831.

Johann Reuchlin was born in 1455, twelve years after Rudolph Agricola, and about ten years before Erasmus of Rotterdam. At that time Scholasticism was still predominant at most Universities. It had, however, already commenced to totter in its struggle against Humanism, to whose attacks it finally succumbed. During several centuries the object of Scholasticism had been to harmonize the religious doctrines of the Church with the philosophy of the Ancients. It was one of the many attempts to amalgamate two opposite aspirations of human nature. Man, by his consciousness of intellectual power, claims to have the right and also the capability of forming a judgment upon anything and everything. On the other hand, the pious acquiescence in the will of a supernatural Being is not less an essential element in the constitution of human nature. Philosophy claimed to be self-sufficient, to be able to attain to Truth by the sole agency of the intellect, without positing anything, without being directed and guided by any other authority. But the Europe of the Middle Ages believed in the doctrines of the Church as in something which it was not only sinful but also absolutely absurd to deny. The question whether their religion was in harmony or in conflict with reason was not asked. They reasoned rather in this way: The teachings of the Christian Church being true, and, on the other hand, reason being the sole arbiter of that which was true or untrue, therefore there could not possibly be a conflict between religion and reason. It was in this way that the doctrines of the Church were subjected to the test of reason; a major was posited which included everything, but not more than it was desired to prove. It was in

this way that the first noteworthy Scholastic philosopher, Johannes Scotus Erigena, understood philosophy. To him philosophy and religion, which latter meant true religion, which again meant his religion, the religion of his Church, were identical. When he seems to give the preference to reason over religion the preference is more apparent than real. He only ventures to do so because he is convinced that the doctrines of his religion as taught by the fathers of his Church are in perfect agreement with reason. He prefers reason because his trust in the truth of his religion is unbounded.

The authorities of the Church saw a danger in this. They took cognizance of the violence occasionally done by Scotus Erigena to ecclesiastical tenets for the sake of bringing them in harmony with his philosophy, or rather the philosophy of those who preceded him. They condemned his writings; they realized that several of their dogmas would stand in danger of being explained away and losing their meaning. Later Scholastic philosophers were obliged to exempt certain doctrines from the ordeal of intellectual investigation. Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus excluded certain dogmas of their Church from their philosophical speculations. This process was extended; the Church narrowed more and more the circle within which it allowed the human intellect to disport itself. All theological questions of importance were at length excluded; only mere trivialities, the most inane questions, were allowed to occupy the by no means small intellects that were the pride of mediaeval Scholasticism. The latter became to be neither a philosophy nor a theology; it neither satisfied the cravings of the pious nor the demands of the intelligent. Piety and intelligence both rose against Scholasticism, sometimes separately, sometimes with united efforts, till the structure of centuries tottered and fell never to rise again. On the one hand, Humanism and the science of Nature were in opposition to the dialectical methods and metaphysical principles of

Scholasticism, whilst piety endeavoured to gratify its spiritual longings after God and things divine by means of theosophical mysticism.

The way had been indicated long ago by Scotus Erigena, but the seeds he had sown, and which he himself had received from those who preceded him, did not bear fruit till at last mediaeval mysticism prevailed above all in Germany. It was not less opposed by the Catholic Church than certain aspects of Scholasticism had been. The first and, perhaps, the greatest of the German mystics, Master Eckhardt, who died in 1329, was persecuted for his doctrines. Eckhardt could not conceive the Deity without Universe and Man. His speculations were founded on the writings of the alleged Areopagite Dionysius and Scotus Erigena. Eckhardt's theosophy was particularly congenial to the German mind. According to Eckhardt nothing can be attributed to God which could not with greater reason be denied him. He is everything and nothing of everything. He has no existence because he is above existence. In this stage God is only the Godhead, non-personal, unknown to himself. He can only become known to himself by becoming united with Nature and Form. From this self-conception is derived, firstly, the difference of persons in God as taught by the Christian Church in the doctrine of the Trinity; and, secondly, the revelation of God in a world. But he can only communicate himself; he is the essence of all things, he is void of all things. Things are only distinguished from God by nothingness.

I have said enough to show how to Eckhardt's mind all things coincide, how the *principium coincidentiae oppositorum* is the leading string in his theosophical speculations. Such mysticism, rooted in the Christian dogmas, in Neo-Platonism, and other ancient speculations, suited the German mind. It was continued by others, especially by Nicholas Cusanus. The old idea of the harmony of contradictories (*coincidentia contradictorum*) was again put forward by him. He held that in God coincide all

contrasts, even those of to be and not to be, of the finite and the infinite ; that in him no contradiction is contradictory, no difference exists between the infinitely great and the infinitely small, between absolute motion and absolute rest, &c., &c.

Cusanus connected with his theosophical speculations the investigation of Nature and the study of mathematics. This new branch of cogitation and knowledge, physical philosophy, was zealously pursued by Theophrastus Paracelsus, whose contemporary, Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim of Cologne, propagated theories which exercised an influence even two hundred years after his death. Agrippa was born in 1487 ; he was thus a younger contemporary of Reuchlin, whose part he took in the latter's famous controversy with the book-burners of Cologne. Agrippa, although an ardent opponent of Scholasticism and writing against the occult arts, practised magic himself. His theories were based on previous theosophical systems and on the Cabbala. He distinguishes between the divine, the heavenly, and the elemental worlds ; he speaks of the world soul, the influence of the stars, of sympathy and antipathy, and of many other points of a similar nature.

We cannot therefore be surprised that Reuchlin, himself a Humanist and an opponent of Scholasticism, was a great admirer of the Cabbala and of Pythagorean doctrines. The theosophical and theological theories of his time once having taken a firm hold on his convictions, he was not the man to rest satisfied with merely adopting them without inquiring into their origin. For Reuchlin, in whatever he undertook, never contented himself with a useful mediocrity. Although not a theologian by profession, and remaining to his last days a staunch adherent of the Catholic faith, and an opponent of that movement which ended in totally altering the convictions of a great portion of the Christian world, his personality was nevertheless of a decisive, though indirect, influence upon the origin and course of that revolt against Rome. As a lawyer he was

one of the most learned of his craft; as a statesman he showed himself a skilled and, what is more, a successful negotiator. Honours were showered upon him; he was created a Count Palatine, although he never assumed the title; he also held the legal profession in low esteem, as having only worldly interests for its object. His aspirations were of a loftier nature; he pined after truth, the mainspring and fountain-head of which he wished to reach. He refused to acquiesce in the evidence of others who declared a truth to emanate from a certain source. He would follow up for himself every stream and brooklet, every fall and course, to discover its origin. He pressed into the service of his explorations his vast achievements in the field of classical literature. For the same purpose he made himself acquainted with the philosophy of his time, with which, in pursuit of an impulse given by others, he connected the Jewish Cabbala. It was in this chase after truth, pure and unadulterated, that he discovered for Christian Europe a Hebrew and Rabbinical literature, which was henceforth to be an important branch of study at every higher seat of learning.

But in searching for truth he firmly believed it possible to find it. Like all great minds he doubted; as with all thinkers his doubts revolved within certain limits. On asking then what was the truth he wished to ascertain we shall find that truth was to him neither more nor less than what it was to his contemporaries. Although he infinitely surpassed the latter in the means employed to reach the goal, yet his ultimate hopes went no farther than theirs. He considered as truth the religion in which he was brought up, and the tenets of which he would have held it sinful to doubt. Nor was his philosophy any other than that which was taught by his contemporaries. His peculiar notions about the occult properties of things, the magical forces, the harmony of contradictories and of that which reason declares to be impossible, sufficiently show that as theologian and philosopher he was neither in



advance of nor behind his time. If as humanist he must be grouped with Johann Wessel, Rudolph Agricola, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Philip Melancthon, he stands as philosopher and Christian between Nicholas Cusanus, who died when Reuchlin was nine years of age, and Agrippa von Nettesheim, who was born when Reuchlin had already attained the age of manhood.

Reuchlin was of opinion that as a sincere and consistent Christian he could not but at the same time believe in his mystical tenets. His thoughts concerning the latter did not induce him to ask whether they were true according to the dictates of reason; he did not try to ascertain whether they were deduced from some primary and simple principle. With him the question was only whether they were or were not historically attested; whether they could stand the ordeal of scrutiny by the light of what he called history; whether they were in accordance with that which he considered to be the Christian religion. But the Christian religion was based upon the traditions of the Jews. Reuchlin was persuaded that God had revealed himself primarily to the Jews; that every truth, religious, moral, scientific, had been, in the first instance, revealed to that people by direct divine inspiration. Whatever other nations could boast of in the way of knowledge and wisdom must have emanated from Hebrew sources; if the Greeks, if Pythagoras, have shown signs that they were possessed of treasures of wisdom, there must have been channels by which the stream of knowledge had been drawn from the Hebrew mainspring. The latter had therefore to be explored; the study of the Hebrew sources of knowledge was imperatively demanded. A knowledge of Hebrew and of the Rabbinical dialects was necessary, and no obstacles could deter Reuchlin from steadily pursuing his object.

The Cabbala showed him doctrines which resembled those of the supposed Areopagite, of Master Eckhardt, of Nicholas Cusanus, in short, of that theosophy which was

in his day prevalent in Germany. The Cabbala had nothing in common with that Scholasticism which it became more and more the fashion to oppose; an opposition in which Reuchlin took an active part. But the Cabbala was a Jewish theosophy; it was a wisdom that had been treasured up by the Jews, by the people who by divine interference were the bearers of everything that was wise. Thus the tenets of the Cabbala were in Reuchlin's eyes raised at once high above the wisdom which the Neo-Platonists and those who followed them were able to teach, for the wisdom of the latter could only be an imitation of the superior, of the really divine wisdom as preserved by the Jews. In the Cabbala Reuchlin thought to have found the fountain-head from which all secular philosophy had emanated, the pure spring from which the turbid streams of Greek and Egyptian knowledge had issued.

But besides his theosophical views, another incentive to study Hebrew and the Rabbinical dialects was drawn from his religious convictions. Firm in his belief that the religion instilled in him from his infancy, the religion of the Christian Catholic Church, was the true religion, he endeavoured to find out and form for himself an opinion about the nature of, and the foundations on which that structure was based. Here again his doubts were historical and not metaphysical; and even these historical doubts moved within a narrow circle only. They stopped far short of an investigation of the acceptability of the doctrines taught by his Church; he would have considered the slightest doubt in that direction as rank heresy. To him it was the work of a bold and independent thinker to doubt the adopted interpretation of the Old and New Testament; to doubt whether the way in which the teachings of his Church were brought in harmony with the text of the Bible was the right way. This he considered an independent, unprejudiced investigation of the truth, and thus the study of Greek and Hebrew became to him a necessary of life.

Now if his theosophical views led him to believe that all things had some occult and mysterious properties beyond those perceptible to the senses, no wonder that he was greatly struck by that doctrine of the Cabbala that every word, every letter, of the Hebrew Bible had an occult significance beyond the simple meaning of the text. If everything in nature had an occult meaning, how much more must this be the case with the words spoken by God himself for the purpose of revealing to man all things superhuman and divine? He threw himself ardently into that kind of speculation; and by making use of an unrestrained freedom of transposing and combining letters and their numerical values, he managed to find in the Hebrew Bible everything he wished to establish. This was a new incentive to him to study Hebrew.

The necessity of learning Hebrew had already been felt by him when he was twenty years of age. At that time he composed a Latin dictionary, which was printed without his name under the title of *Vocabularius brevilocus*. Then already he expressed himself that we must appeal to the Hebrew book whenever a mistake in the Old Testament was found. In this dictionary, which was based on older works, Reuchlin was under the necessity of quoting many a Hebrew word which he did not understand. Such parrot-like copying was repulsive to Reuchlin's nature. It is true the translations of such words were given to him, but how was he to know that they were correct? He disliked using translations; even if correct, he compared them to wine that had been poured from cask to cask. His resolution to master the Hebrew language was probably taken at an early time, but he had to wait for twelve years longer before he was able to gratify his wish to some extent. For the study of Hebrew was at that time unknown in Christian Europe.

Reuchlin's education had not been neglected; he had acquired the rudiments of knowledge in his native town of Pforzheim, where he attended the Latin school. When

he was fifteen years of age he went to the University of Freiburg, where the attention of the court was drawn to him by his beautiful voice. He became one of the choristers, and his personal acquaintance with the Margrave Frederick began in a most curious way. Papal nuncios had been sent to the court of the Margrave, and when they came to take leave and to receive their dispatches, they were addressed by the High Chancellor. This was otherwise a good and clever man, but he had been born in Hechingen, and had transferred to his Latin the abominable German pronunciation of his district. He began his oration: "Ceilsissimus et eilustrissumus naoster prainceps eintellexit," &c. The Italians were astonished; they did not understand a word. They protested not to be able to accept this as a dispatch. In this embarrassment some one remembered that Reuchlin, the amanuensis of the Chancellor, could speak pure Latin. He was called, and carried on the discourse in a style cultivated by practice and travelling, and was much admired. He became attached to the service of the Margrave, whom he accompanied on a journey to Rome in 1473. In 1474 he went to Basle. Here he met Lapidanus, with whom he had previously been acquainted, and who was now professor at Basle. Reuchlin proceeded to study Greek under his guidance, perfected himself in grammar, and read Aristotle. He eagerly grasped the opportunity offered him here of learning Greek from Andronicus Contablacas, a native of Greece. From this circumstance originated that which was called in the schools the Reuchlinian mode of pronouncing Greek. He thought that his teacher, being a Greek himself, ought to be an authority on pronunciation. It was at Basle that Reuchlin composed his Latin Dictionary, which was indeed compiled from older works, chiefly from that of Papias, and in which he showed already then that he was not to be a mere manufacturer of books, but that he promised to become an independent worker in the field of learning. After a few years he visited Paris for the second time and continued

his Greek studies under the Greek George Hermonymos. But Reuchlin, not being rich, had to work for his support. He selected the legal profession for his career, went to Orleans, where, whilst studying Roman law, he supported himself by teaching Greek. For this purpose he composed in Greek a grammar of the Greek language. Having received at Poitiers his diploma as Licentiate of Civil Law, he left France and went to Tübingen in 1481.

Several reasons are given for his selection of Tübingen as his residence. The University at that town was renowned far and wide, it was near Reuchlin's native town of Pforzheim, and the court of the Count of Wurtemberg was accessible to men of learning. But besides these allurements I cannot help thinking that there was another magnet that attracted him thither. This magnet was the study of the Hebrew language.

There can be no doubt that already at that time he was bent upon studying Hebrew. But such a wish, easily as it was conceived, was difficult of execution. Reuchlin's great contemporaries, Johann Wessel, who himself knew a little Hebrew, and Rudolph Agricola, rather discouraged him; but this did not deter a man of Reuchlin's persistency. The fact is, there were no teachers, hardly any books, and nothing in the shape of a grammar or dictionary accessible to Reuchlin. He could not employ Jews, because in a number of German states no Jews were permitted to dwell; and some Jews thought it wrong to teach Hebrew to a non-Jew. Although as a good Christian he sincerely wished that all Jews might be induced to become Christians, he somehow or other felt strong dislike to the baptized Jews he came across. It is true the Council of Vienna had decreed in 1312 that chairs for Hebrew be erected in Paris, Oxford, Salamanca, and Boulogne, but the decree remained almost a dead letter. Now it happened that at the time when Reuchlin terminated his studies in France, there were in Tübingen two theologians who had the reputation of knowing Hebrew, namely, Conrad Summenhardt and

Paul Scriptoris. When we consider the doggedness with which Reuchlin persisted in his determination to master the Hebrew language we are led to believe that the presence of these two men in Tübingen was one of the inducements that caused Reuchlin to settle there.

Whether these two scholars were of much use to Reuchlin is another question. We may safely assume that Reuchlin had, by his own perseverance, gained some knowledge of Hebrew, which, infinitesimally small as it may have been, must have equalled, if not surpassed, that of those two professors. There is a circumstance which, I think, enables us to gauge the extent of their Hebrew knowledge.

There lived at that time a man called Conrad Pellican, a clergyman, a man of learning, who became at a later period a friend and follower of Zwingli. From his knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew he was called by Thomas Murner, in his *Kirchendieb- und Ketzer Kalender* (Calendar of Church Robbers and Heretics), an observant, recalcitrant heretic, and an apostate in three languages<sup>1</sup>. When he first conceived the wish of learning Hebrew he had the good luck of coming across a commentary of Nicholas de Lira to some books of the Hebrew Bible. He tries to read the Hebrew words by means of the Latin transcription, puts to memory the letters of such words, by these means learns the alphabet, and practises reading by the recurrence of the same letters in other words. After a year he obtains a Hebrew Bible, and composes a small grammar, "*De modo legendi et intelligendi Hebraea*," which according to some was printed in 1503. In his autobiography he tells us that he was vexed at not being able to find, except in rare instances, the first person of the present indicative, which he supposed to be the stem of the verb, like in Latin, *amo*, *lego*, *audio*: "*Sed dolebat mihi valde non inveniri in verbis, nisi raro, primam personam praesentis indicativi ut est apud latinos thema: amo, lego, audio.*" After some time

<sup>1</sup> Conradus Pellicanus, *Chronicon*. ed. Riggensbach (Basle, 1877).

he happened to meet Reuchlin, to whom he communicated the difficulty, and who of course at once told him where to look for the roots of verbs. "Tunc subridens humanissimus Doctor Reuchlin dicebat, apud Hebraeos thema verborum non esse primam personam nec indicativi, nec imperativi, sed tertiam singularem praeteriti perfecti." Pellican adds: "hac regula accepta exultavi in animo, sciens huiusmodi verbo impleta Biblia."

Now it is known that Pellican had been assisted in his work by Conrad Summenhardt and Paul Scriptoris, and we can conclude how unsatisfactory the knowledge of these two professors must have been.

If Reuchlin had some hopes of getting information from them he must soon have been undeceived. He proceeded to pursue his studies on his own account, but with little success. It is true he was already in 1483 praised for his knowledge of Hebrew, but who can tell with how much justice? He had no Hebrew Bible. The first copy was printed in Italy in 1488; Reuchlin asked a friend to procure him a copy, but it is not known whether the latter was successful.

But his craving for receiving instruction in Hebrew was at length to be gratified. His master Eberhard with the Beard sent Reuchlin to the Emperor to obtain the latter's sanction to an enlargement of his territory. It was on this occasion that Reuchlin and his brother were ennobled by the Emperor and received the dignity of Counts Palatine. It was on this occasion that Reuchlin became acquainted with the Emperor's Jewish body physician, Jacob Jehiel Loans, who occupied an honoured position at the court and became Reuchlin's teacher of Hebrew. Reuchlin never assumed the title conferred upon him by the Emperor, but always remained plain Johann Reuchlin; but the acquaintance with Loans was always considered by him as one of the happiest events of his life. A blind man who had been groping in the dark for years, when by a happy accident the light of heaven dawned upon him, would not

rejoice more than Reuchlin did when the portals of the divine truth were widely opened before him. In the same year that Columbus added a new world to the one within whose limits mankind had been hitherto confined, Reuchlin disclosed to Christian Europe a new language and literature. Reuchlin never forgot, nor was he ever ashamed to own, how much he was indebted to Loans; he quotes him in subsequent books as “praeceptor meus mea sententia valde doctus homo J. J. Loans Hebraeus,” or “praeceptor meus ille J. J. Loans doctor excellens.” Eight years later, when he had made considerable progress in Hebrew, he writes to Loans a Hebrew letter, in which he informs him that after they had parted he had succeeded in successfully continuing his Hebrew studies, a fact at which his master no doubt would greatly rejoice. He writes:

שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב אדוני ר' יעקוב אלופי ומיודעי: ממני המשתוקק  
והנבסף לחוות פניך הנעימים להתענג מזיו פניך המאירות לשמוע למודך  
טהור: ועתה באתי במגלת ספר להודיעך כי שבה לאל אחרי נסעי ממך  
הצלחתי בלמודי והנעתי בהשגה גדולה: ידעתי תשמח ותגיל • אני יוחנן  
רוחלין מפורצן הכותב ראש חודש כסלו שבת הרסא: ליד הנכבד ר' יעקוב  
בכמר יחיאל לואנש. (1 Nov. 1500)

Now that the gates of this branch of learning were opened to him, he passed with gigantic strides over the whole field. Having successfully concluded his mission, he left the court loaded with honours which he little esteemed, and took up his residence at Heidelberg, where he became Agricola's successor as keeper of the library of Johann Dalburg, Bishop of Worms. He also became councillor of Philip, Elector of the Palatinate, and chief censor (*Zuchtmeister*) of his sons. He had perfected himself in Hebrew, continued his Cabbalistic studies, and published in 1494 his work *De Verbo mirifico*, which contains many quotations, but yet does not display any particular knowledge of Hebrew, as almost all quotations could be accounted for as having been derived from secondary sources. His



wonderful word consists of the letters י, ה, ש, ו, ה, in which he blended together the Hebrew name of the Deity with three letters of the name ייִשׁוּעַ. He ascribed many mystical properties to that word, which is frequently to be found on the title-pages of his books. At Heidelberg he wished to give lessons in Hebrew, but the monks prevented him. This need not surprise us, for they also disliked the study of Greek. When Reuchlin's brother Dionysius, who had been educated at his expense, became magister in Tübingen in 1494, he was to occupy the first chair in Greek at that University. But the monks put difficulties in his way. The Elector repeatedly writes to them to allow Dionysius to lecture, but it was of no use; they refused to give him a college room. At that time Philip's son was to marry a lady who stood to him in such a degree of consanguinity that a papal dispensation was required. Moreover Philip himself was at that time excommunicated for withholding some revenues of the monks. Reuchlin was sent to Rome to set matters right. This was his third journey to Rome. His negotiations were again successful; but being retained for a whole year, he employed his time in further adding to his knowledge of Hebrew by taking instruction from Rabbi Obadiah Sforzo, who was a classical scholar, a physician, a philosopher, and a Cabbalist. Reuchlin, at the same time, tried to obtain Hebrew books. He never ceased learning, and even as late as 1516 he wished to take lessons in Chaldaean from Johann Potkin, the same who had instructed Petrus Galatinus, one of the most shameless plagiarists that ever lived<sup>1</sup>.

Reuchlin's work, *De Rudimentis Hebraicis*, appeared in March, 1506. He was very proud of this work, and on the last page he puts the verse of Horace, "exegi monumentum aere perennius." The work is divided into three books. The two first contain the dictionary, and the third

<sup>1</sup> For the following short survey of Reuchlin's books on Hebrew grammar, compare Ludwig Geiger, *Life of Reuchlin*, and *Das Studium der Hebräischen Sprache*.

the grammar. The dictionary is a close imitation of Rabbi David Kimchi's ספר השרשים, the first edition of which was printed in 1480. Kimchi's work was written in Rabbinical Hebrew, in a concise style. Reuchlin's arrangement differs from that of Kimchi only in a few points. The words are arranged according to the roots, only that Kimchi places the quadralitera at the end of every letter, and Reuchlin embodies them between the trilitera.

Reuchlin gives the proper nouns, which were omitted by Kimchi. Kimchi places the Chaldaean words of the Bible at the end, and Reuchlin puts them with the Hebrew words. Sometimes it would appear as if Reuchlin's dictionary contained more articles than that of Kimchi; the fact is that he sometimes dissolves the latter's articles into four, and even into six parts. The quotations are those of Kimchi, which Reuchlin corrects only occasionally. On the whole it may be said that Reuchlin closely followed Kimchi, although other Jewish authors are also utilized by him. He quotes the Massorah, which must have been no easy task to him, for he had to glean those enigmatical annotations from manuscripts. He quotes the מורה נבוכים of Maimonides, whom he calls R. Moyses Aegyptius, the נהרי of R. Jehudah Halevy, and occasionally Nachmanides, Gersonides, and Cabbalistic writers. He quotes copiously from Rashi, who is to him *ordinarius scripturae interpres*. His quotations from Rashi he had at first hand, and not from Nicholas de Lira's commentaries, for he says that if he were to strike out from De Lira's works all that the latter had taken from Rashi, only a few pages would remain. He had a much higher opinion of Paulus Burgensis. Of the fathers of the Church he quotes Jerome most frequently; we must not forget that he had always taken the latter as a sort of a model, whose life he was desirous of imitating. In the greater number of cases Reuchlin adopts his opinions, but he is sometimes surprised at his interpretations. Of Augustin he says once, "Augustinus, nescio quo somno motus." Not less cavalierly he treats

the Vulgate, of which he says once, "Nescio quid blacterat," and again, "Nescio quid nostra translatio somniavit"; and he complains of the many defects of that translation. He kept all along steadfast to a principle laid down by him elsewhere: "Quamquam enim Hieronymum sanctum veneror ut angelum et Lyram colo ut magistrum, tamen adoro veritatem ut deum." Besides the authorities mentioned, he made use of the Septuagint, Symmachus, Theodotion, Aquila, and the Chaldaean versions. His Arabic quotations are from Kimchi; he knew no Syriac, and it is doubtful whether he studied Arabic at a later period. He illustrates some statements by examples from Greek and Latin, and even from German idioms. He shows hardly anything of Bible criticism in the modern sense of the word.

The third part of his *Rudimenta* is devoted to Grammar. It is the first work of its kind. Reuchlin's object is to help the reader to an independent and grammatically intelligent reading of the Bible, and not to teach how to write Hebrew. He is very much afraid his readers might endeavour to read the Hebrew the wrong way. He therefore gives the

#### CANON.

Non est liber legendus hic ceu ceteri  
 Faciem sinistra dextera dorsum tene  
 Et de sinistra paginas ad dexteram  
 Quascumque verte. Quae Latina vides  
 Legito latine, hebraea si sit insita  
 A dextera legenda sunt sinistrorsum.

And in the dedicatory epistle to his brother Dionysius he gives the same directions.

The work is very elementary. As a reading exercise he gives the "genealogia Mariae virginis" in Hebrew. Strange to say, this genealogy astonished John Fisher so much that he asked Erasmus to inquire from Reuchlin whence he had taken it. He discusses the consonants and their properties, the vowels, diphthongs, the שווא. His rules are ample and diffuse, he recapitulates them and inter-

sperses them with words of encouragement to the student. He analyzes every word, every syllable quoted. He treats on the noun and its genders and declension; on the pronouns, the numerals, the preposition ׀ when used as ablative. He admonishes his reader to find the root of every word, be it ever so compound, and illustrates this by showing how it would have to be done in Latin in the words *hae inhonorificabilitudines*. For the verb he uses as paradigms פֿעל and פֿקר. Instead of Kal, Piel, &c., he speaks of the first, the second conjugation, &c., with their passive voices, and thus, assuming an active and a passive Hithpaël, he has four conjugations with their passives. Their regular verb follows, then the quadralitera, the verb with suffixes, a short syntax, the prepositions, and, at last, the rule of the vav conversive as given him by Loans. His chief source is again Kimchi in his סֵפֶר מִכְלִיל. But he also quotes Moses Kimchi, Ibn Ezra, Ibn Ganach, and a סֵפֶר שֶׁבֶל טוֹב by Moyses Zejag. The book was really written by Moses Kimchi, but the MS. contained at the end a notice that the book had been sold to Moses Ziug, and Reuchlin mistook him for its author. He calls Gabirol, the Avicbron of the Scholastic philosophers, Moses instead of Solomon. On the whole it can be said that none of these quotations are at first hand.

The work was not a success from a business point of view. In 1510 there were still 750 copies on hand. The bookseller Amorbach of Basle complained to Reuchlin that the book did not sell. Reuchlin told him to wait, in time he would make great profit by it, "for," Reuchlin added, "if I live, the Hebrew language must come out; should I die, the opening is made."

Reuchlin had particularly turned his attention to the literature of the Rabbis. He wanted to obtain a copy of the Talmud, but without success. In 1510 he wrote that he would like to pay the price for a copy of the Talmud twice over, but he had not yet been able to obtain one. In 1512 he bought the treatise of סְנְהֶרִין. The manuscript,

which is now in the library at Carlsruhe, has some notes from his hand. He quotes once from this treatise; his other quotations from the Talmud are not original. In the division of the Talmud he follows the mistake of some of his predecessors that the Talmud had four parts, the first treating of feasts and ceremonies, the second of herbs and seeds, the third of matrimonial laws, and the fourth of civil and criminal law. If he had ever possessed a copy of the whole Talmud he would certainly have corrected that error.

In 1512 he published the seven so-called penitential psalms (vi, xxxii, xxxviii, li, cii, cxxx, cxliii), with a translation and commentary. It was the first Hebrew text printed in Germany. His explanations are most elementary, and the book was written in such a clear and easy style that Sebastian Munster said at a later period that a child of seven might learn Hebrew from it. His authorities are again the Jewish authors Rashi, Ibn Ezra, the Kimchis, Nachmanides, and the Targumim. In Psalm li. 6 he would fain prefer the plain meaning of the words למען תצדק בברך to the translation given in the letter to the Romans iii. 4. He excuses this boldness by a quotation from Hieronymus, "quod frequenter annotavimus apostolos et evangelistas non iisdem verbis usos esse in testamenti veteris exemplis quibus in propriis voluminibus continentur." In the dedicatory epistle to Jacob Lemp he says that his Rudimenta would not display their full usefulness as long as there were not more Hebrew Bibles to hand. He had hoped that a great number of Bibles or other Hebrew books would come to Germany, but the Emperor Maximilian's wars in Italy had made it impossible. The Pfefferkorn braggarts had promised to print Hebrew books, but they did not keep their promise. Less elementary and diffuse was his translation and commentary of Ps. cx-cxiv, but the book was never printed.

He also published in the same year a translation of the poem קצרת כסף of Joseph אֲזוּבִי (Hyssopaeus), whom he calls

*poetam dulcissimum*, and in the preface he says that he had formerly thought that Hebrew was unsuitable for poetical composition, but that this poem had taught him that he had been mistaken. Ezobi's poem has found much favour among Christian scholars. It was also translated by Mercerus, and both the original and the two translations were reproduced by Wolf in his *Bibliotheca*<sup>1</sup>.

In 1518 Reuchlin issued his work *De accentibus et Orthographia linguae Hebraicae*. When he wrote his commentary on the penitential psalms he was already thinking of writing this work. In the preface he says that he dedicated the book to the Cardinal Adrianus, "to give the youth, bent upon studying languages, a leader under whose banner they would be able to fight, if need be, with those ferocious and rabid dogs who hated all good arts; against the disease and pestilence of everything old, against the burners of books who thirsted for the destruction and extermination of the most ancient monuments. As an old man he might cease to teach elements of grammar, fit only for children and young people, but his zeal for the spread of the study of Hebrew makes him forget all objections." It is very rare for Reuchlin thus to allude in his learned books to his cruel and relentless persecutors.

The work is divided into three books. The first book he calls *מטע*, it treats on pronunciation. Taking the root *פעל* for his paradigm he gives all possible forms of words with indication of the *מלעיל* and *מלרע*; but for words with suffixes he takes *פקר* instead of *פעל*. Every word is accompanied by a quotation from the Bible where it occurs. He gives the noun with all suffixes, the prepositions, some pronouns, the verbs with and without suffixes.

The second book he calls *מתג*, for the proper use of which he gives twenty-seven rules. He speaks of the *דגש* and of the difference between *ש' ימין* and *ש' שמאל*. He calls these signs rhetorical accents, governing a rhetorical metre.

<sup>1</sup> An English translation of the "Silver Bowl" appears in the present number of the JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW.

The third book he calls גנינה. He says that it was an ancient custom of the Hebrews to devote songs to God, and refers to the example of Moses. This custom had survived even to his days, and was a daily custom in the synagogue. He enumerates the accents, and translates their names into Latin. He then explains them, and discusses their value. He confesses that in all this he followed the Rabbis. At the end he gives the tunes of each accent as they were and are still chanted in the synagogues. There is something curious in this musical transcription. Firstly, the notes, while written in the musical notation of his time, run, however, like Hebrew, from right to left. But in his zeal he displays an excess of lucidity which caused much obscurity. In the synagogue the chanting is done by the reader only, and there is never a chorus. Reuchlin thought of a performance by choristers, and arranged the tunes for four voices; namely, the discant (treble), the alto, the tenor, and the bass. Contrary to modern custom, the tenor contains the melody, which thus appears in the middle of the harmony. Moreover, the accents being given in the order of the "*Zarka* table," the harmony does not always place a musical close on just those accents which demand it. Now I am told by the Rev. Francis Cohen that what happened was this. Some writers on mediaeval music thought, firstly, that the melody was contained in the discant (soprano), and not in the tenor; secondly, that they had to read the notes from left to right; and thirdly, that the latter presented one consecutive melody. You will not be surprised therefore that, after much trouble, they could make nothing of it.

The book on the Hebrew accents was the last of Reuchlin's large works. But he was not satisfied with learning himself, and writing books, and, having written them, leaving them to their fate. With him the propagation of the study of Hebrew was the great object of his life. Though this study was not the cause of the bitter persecutions he had to undergo at the hands of the

firebrands of Cologne, it was used by them as a weapon with which to strike at him. But neither this nor anything else caused him to waver. He persuaded many students to take up the study of Hebrew. The influence he exercised in this direction was enormous. There were many who wished to learn, but the question was, how was it to be accomplished? The Universities were useless. In 1510 Reuchlin petitioned the Emperor, "for the sake of God and the Christian faith, to effect that at every German University two professors of Hebrew be appointed for ten years, and that the Jews be compelled to lend Hebrew books against good securities for this purpose, till such a time as the Christians would provide for themselves printed and written books." But ten years elapsed before a beginning of that kind was made. Numbers of young people came to Reuchlin to learn, others consulted him in writing on difficult points which he always was ready to answer. Such letters of inquiry he even received from monks and soldiers. Among his followers was a young Englishman, Richard Crokus, the author of some books, who wrote to him that he was always at Reuchlin's service, and asked him to dedicate his next Cabbalistic work to John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. John Fisher removed to Michael House in Cambridge, now embodied in Trinity College, in 1484; he was elected Master of his college 400 years ago, in 1495. He was chaplain of Margaret, Countess of Richmond, the mother of Henry VII. In 1501 he became Doctor of Divinity, in the following year he was appointed Professor of Divinity, and in 1504 he became Bishop of Rochester. When Reuchlin was so bitterly persecuted by his slandering tormentors of Cologne, he asked Erasmus to put his case before the English scholars, who only knew the reports spread by his Cologne enemies. But Reuchlin was mistaken. The English scholars admired him greatly, especially Thomas More and John Fisher. The latter was one of Reuchlin's great admirers; he took his part in the controversy, sent him



tokens of esteem, admonished him to persevere, and expressed a wish of making a journey for the sole purpose of seeing Reuchlin and conversing with him. The authors of the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, pretending to inveigh against the influx of foreign students, which, they thought, was flooding the University of Leipsic, thus allude to the aforesaid Crokus in their satirical imitation of the monkish dog-Latin of the day: "Et est alius hic, qui etiam legit in Graeco, vocatus Richardus Crocus, et venit ex Anglia. Ego dixi nuper: Diabolus, venit iste ex Anglia? Ego credo, quod, si esset unus poeta ibi, ubi piper crescit, ipse etiam veniret Leiptzick." Crokus was a good scholar, and certainly did not deserve such quizzing. But we know that all blame contained in those *epistolae* was meant for praise.

Obsolete as Reuchlin's works are at the present day, his boast that "he had erected for himself a monument more imperishable than bronze" is true to the letter. He was as good as his word, "that the study of Hebrew must come out," and he was, after all, as he said himself, the first. The study of Hebrew in Christian Europe commenced with him, was taken up by his immediate successors, and has never since been relinquished. I cannot dwell on the vigour of his mind and his powers of application, as shown by the fact that he could unswervingly pursue the study of Hebrew, and zealously work for its propagation at a time when he was engaged with delicate political negotiations, with legal affairs, with theological and philosophical, or rather theosophical subjects, with the study of Greek and Roman authors; at a time when he had to sustain a struggle of life and death against unscrupulous and influential persecutors. This struggle only would have been enough to weigh down the energies of any man less richly endowed by nature, less earnest in the fulfilment of his duties, than Reuchlin. As I said before, it was my duty to dwell on the least interesting phase of Reuchlin's life. Reuchlin has many claims on the gratitude of later

generations, but this one portion of his activity, his discovery of Hebrew learning, would have been sufficient to secure for him the regard of posterity. It was through Reuchlin that Germany can boast that one of her children has disclosed a Hebrew and Rabbinical literature to Christian Europe.

It might not have been so. If circumstances had at one time been more favourable, that privilege might have fallen to the lot of England. It will always be a cause of regret to every friend of learning and science, and particularly to a loyal and patriotic Englishman, that the vast erudition and patient researches of Roger Bacon were destined to remain without influence upon the history of civilization. Although naturally of quite different disposition and intellectual formation, yet was there much in common between Roger Bacon and Johann Reuchlin. Both of them were induced by the very same instincts to occupy themselves with the study of Hebrew. It is noteworthy that in this respect some observations made by Bacon and by Reuchlin are almost identical to the letter. Both believed in a mysterious and spiritual meaning of every word of the Bible beyond the one which appeared on the surface. Both held that all knowledge, all philosophy, had been revealed by God to the Jews, and was transferred by the latter to the other nations. Bacon held that Joseph had instructed the Egyptian princes and elders, that Moses had known the Egyptian wisdom, that Solomon had been the greatest philosopher, that medicine was invented by the sons of Adam and Noah. Like Reuchlin, he made use of Jewish instructors, he complained of the difficulty of getting even the most indispensable books, he complained of the ignorance which caused words that were in reality Hebrew to be derived from Latin or Greek roots. He had the same aversion as Reuchlin to translations, even to correct ones, and, almost in the same words as Reuchlin, he declared "that it was sweeter to drink water from the very source than from turbid pools, and that the wine from the

first vat was purer and more wholesome and of better quality than after it had been poured from vessel to vessel." He, equally with Reuchlin, distrusted translations, even those translations of the Bible which enjoyed the sanction of his Church. He even goes so far as to charge Jerome with want of moral courage, which occasionally prompted the latter wittingly to put down an erroneous version so as not to irritate the crowd, who considered him a falsifier of the text on account of his novel translation of certain passages. He complains of the prevalent ignorance of Hebrew, and that the knowledge of that language, possessed by a few, was only mechanical, without any insight into Hebrew grammar. Bacon himself professed to be a good Hebrew scholar, and he asserts that he was able to teach Hebrew to any diligent and zealous pupil, so as to enable the latter to read and understand Holy Writ and the ancient sages, and everything appertaining to the interpretation of such writings, and all this within three days. In this respect Bacon differed considerably from Reuchlin, who said that the student commenced to master Hebrew only when he had reached the stage of despair and was on the point of throwing up the study of Hebrew as an impossible task. It is a pity that the Hebrew Grammar which Roger Bacon is supposed to have written does not now exist—if it ever existed. It was the fate of this wonderful man that all the discoveries he made in so many branches of knowledge should die with him, and remain without effect upon the development of learning. This was also the case with his study of Hebrew, and that which in another age and under different circumstances might have been brought about by Roger Bacon was left to be accomplished by Johann Reuchlin.

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